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**Positive ‘Whānau Management’:
Privileging the Centrality of Whānau
and Culturally Specific Understandings
of Child Discipline for Effective
Psychological Practice with Māori**

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Clinical Psychology
at Massey University, Wellington
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ABSTRACT

The passing of the ‘anti-smacking’ law in 2007 took the practice of child discipline to the forefront of public debate in Aotearoa, New Zealand. Questions emerged concerning effective alternative forms of discipline to physical punishment. While there is a great deal of psychological knowledge on discipline, there is a dearth of research that specifically examines Māori child-rearing and discipline practices. This is important knowledge for psychologists to have, considering their role in the prevention of child abuse and their ethical obligation to promote positive discipline strategies. As children of Māori ethnicity are currently over-represented in child abuse statistics, it is particularly important that psychologists acquire the awareness, knowledge and skills needed to work competently with Māori when addressing issues of child discipline. In spite of these negative statistics, this thesis promotes a strength-based approach to working and researching with Māori and aimed to explore the *successful* Māori child-rearing values and practices in operation today, and how these behavioural discipline strategies can be effective in psychological practice with Māori.

Adopting a ‘Māori research paradigm’, which incorporated both Māori-centred and Kaupapa Māori research principles, in-depth semi-structured interviews were employed to determine how Māori psychologists, as experts of best practice for Māori, negotiated psychological practices when addressing discipline. This was combined with a case study of a contemporary Māori whānau operating in strength with the use of a positive non-smacking approach to ‘whānau management’. Thematic analyses of the data led this thesis to conclude that privileging the centrality of whānau and culturally specific understandings of child-rearing and discipline is necessary for effective psychological practices that draw on standard behavioural discipline strategies. This thesis then addressed the ways in which these understandings are relevant to New Zealand psychologists’ ethical obligation to cultural competencies.

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FOREWORD

My interest in Māori child-rearing practices stemmed from my growing awareness of my Māori heritage and my passion and interest for children and young people. Growing up in the small town of Te Teko, New Zealand, I never thought much about my cultural identity; it was just part of my life. I was quite oblivious to the fact that I was the fairest looking Māori in the Kapa Haka group or that my teacher had arranged special te reo (Māori language) extension classes for me. I was aware that being Māori came in many different forms however and my whānau later developed a story that always makes people laugh; that my older sister is called the dark chocolate, my little sister the caramilk and me, the milky bar chocolate. It wasn't until I moved from a public to a private high school in Hamilton (where continuing my Māori studies was not an option I could take), followed by being quite homesick while completing my undergraduate degree at Otago University, that I became more consciously aware of my Māori cultural identity through the absence of my connectedness with other Māori people, language and culture. From there I quickly developed a desire to help our Māori people in some way.

I have always had a passion and love for children. I began babysitting the local kids as a young teenager before working part-time as a nanny for many years alongside my studies (often questioning why the parents couldn't or weren't able to have their nan look after the kids in the holidays, like my parents could). In the university breaks I was drawn to work for child-focused agencies such as Child, Youth and Family Services, and Barnados. I first put my two interests together when I carried out my honours dissertation on Māori whāngai,¹ where I explored the positive relationships between grandparents and their whāngai mokopuna (grandchildren) in my tribal area of Ngāti Porou. I noted the gentleness of their relationship to one another, and the positive way in which they approached the discipline of their children.

At around the same time, the debate about the 'anti-smacking bill' had begun in New Zealand, which sought to amend section 59 of the Crimes Act, 1961 ('the Act'). Due to my own understanding of the psychological literature around learning, together with my interest in supporting children's rights, I was naturally in support of this Bill and often found myself in many heated debates! It became quite clear that there was a

¹ Where the child is given to family members to be raised.

mindset of acceptance towards the use of physical punishment or ‘smacking’ and that common knowledge of effective alternatives was scarce or simply ignored. I was particularly interested in what alternatives Māori found helpful and effective as, although there were negative stories about Māori child abuse in the media, I knew that there were many positive stories to be told as well. Therefore, this thesis begins to tell these positive stories, and in doing so aims to demonstrate how knowledge of Māori practices of child-rearing and discipline are necessary to help inform our psychological practice. In this way, this thesis aims to provide a helpful piece of research to guide psychologists in their continuing cultural competencies in Aotearoa, New Zealand.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
FOREWORD.....	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vii
THESIS OVERVIEW	1
CHAPTER ONE: Literature Review on Discipline Practices.....	3
Conceptualising Discipline.....	3
Effective Discipline Approaches	4
Physical Punishment: Causes and Consequences.....	6
Should Physical Punishment be used?.....	11
Physical Punishment and the Law	12
Encouraging Change.....	15
Summary.....	17
CHAPTER TWO: Māori Child-Rearing and Discipline Practices	19
Introduction: Māori Response to the Act	19
Historical Research.....	20
Current Research on Māori Discipline Practices.....	22
Summary.....	24
Rationale for this study.....	24
CHAPTER THREE: Methodology	27
Introduction	27
The Need for Māori Research Methodologies	27
Kaupapa Māori Research.....	28
Māori-Centred Research.....	32
Chosen Methodology.....	33
Methods	35
The Participants	35
Recruitment of the Key Informants (Māori Psychologists)	36
Recruitment of the Case Study Whānau.....	37
Data Collection	38
Thematic Analysis: Analysing the Interview Transcripts	40
Thematic Tables of Themes	41
CHAPTER FOUR: Understanding the Whānau	45
The Changing Nature of Whānau.....	45
Children as Taonga.....	51
Whānau Intervention and Collective Responsibility.....	53
Shifting and Swapping	60
Permissive and Relaxed.....	61
The Special Role of Kaumātua.....	64
Whakawhānaungatanga and Kai	65
Wairua	69
Cultural Identity.....	71
When Whānau Struggle.....	76
Summary.....	79
CHAPTER FIVE: Behavioural Interventions and the Law.....	81

Conceptualising Discipline.....	81
Public versus Professional Understandings.....	81
Teaching Values and Pro-social Behaviour.....	83
Control.....	86
Practicing Discipline	86
Factors Influencing Approach	86
Strategies	90
Effective Discipline	94
Crimes Amendment Act (Section 59)	99
Smacking	99
Conflicting Views.....	103
Information Sharing and Education.....	107
Summary.....	111
CHAPTER SIX: Conclusion	113
The Research Journey: A Summary of the Findings.....	113
Limitations and Future Research Recommendations	116
The Implication of the Findings in this Research.....	117
REFERENCES	121
APPENDICES	137
APPENDIX A: Information sheet for Māori Psychologists.....	137
APPENDIX B: Information Sheet for Case Study Whānau	139
APPENDIX C: Consent Form.....	140
APPENDIX D: Interview Guide for Māori Psychologists.....	141
APPENDIX E: Interview Guide for Case Study Whānau.....	142
APPENDIX F: Authority for the Release of Transcripts Form	143